Monroe County Legislature Meeting
May 24, 1988

STATEMENT ON DESIGNATION OF TOPFREE EQUALITY DAY

I am speaking for the Coalition for Topfree Equality to request that June 21 be designated Topfree Equality Day in Monroe County. The day will be devoted to making people more aware of the importance of topfree equality for women.

New York State law now requires women, but not men, to cover their chests in public (except when performing or nursing a baby). Thus, a woman may expose her breasts to sell drinks to men in a topless bar but may not enjoy the sun and water topfree with her family and friends at a picnic on the beach.

Requiring women to cover their breasts conveys the message that women's breasts must be hidden from view, that they are dirty or obscene. Little girls must cover up while boys can play freely. Requiring that breasts be concealed and then using them in advertising to sell products and in pornography turns breasts into sex objects. By denying people the sight of the great variety of breasts in normal nonsexual situations, the image of breasts that people have is unrealistic. Many women grow up with the image of unnatural Barbie doll type breasts. Consequently, they are unhappy with their breasts and develop poorer body self-concepts than men. No wonder breast augmentation is the leading cosmetic surgery in the U.S. today.

Sometimes the law requiring women to conceal their breasts is wrongly justified as being a simple non-discriminatory requirement that all sex organs be covered. But breasts are not sex organs; they are not essential to reproduction. Ironically, requiring that breasts be kept covered handicaps their real function. The only reason they are thought of as sex organs is that some men find them sexually enticing. Requiring women to cover their bodies because of men's lust is an unjust imposition. As people become used to seeing topfree women on beaches, in parks, and gardening in their yards at home, the breast fetish will gradually be reduced and men and women will both gain a healthier perspective on women and their bodies. Topfree women are now socially acceptable throughout Europe and in some parts of this country.

The issue of topfree equality is not trivial. The imposition on women is great, the inconvience real, and the stigma pernicious. Fifty years ago in New York State men were required to cover their chests in public. They rebelled and the laws were changed. Topfree equality for all is long overdue.

June 21 is the anniversary of the Topfree Seven action in 1986 which gained national attention and last summer's topfree picnic at Genesee Valley Park where 25 topfree women and their friends canoed on the river, played frisbee and softball, and picnicked without any harassment.

We urge you to declare June 21 Topfree Equality Day in Monroe County - a day dedicated to educating people on the subject and changing New York State's discriminatory, damaging and demeaning Exposure of a Person law.

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